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DECEPTION IN TENNYSON'S IDYLLS OF THE KING

by



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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled Deception in Tennyson's "Idylls of the King," submitted by Edward Henry Friesen in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the role of deceit, deceptiveness, and illusion in the thematic pattern of Tennyson's Idylls of the King. Chapter I introduces the notion of the deceptive two-world environment and the problems of perception such an environment creates. Chapter II examines a number of key passages, characters, and situations in the Idylls to illustrate that intentional deceit, inherent deceptiveness, and illusion abound in the Idylls and form an intricate part of its theme. Chapters III and IV discuss the major characters in the Idylls and their relationship to their deceptive two-world environment of sense and soul. The two-world environment proves too difficult to cope with for the majority of characters. Some are trapped in the world of sense and blind to the world of soul, while others despair of the world of sense and desire to live only in the world of soul. Chapter V examines characters who find a solution to the problem of their two-world environment. The thesis argues that the one who finds the best solution to the problem is Dagonet, the fool, as he dances upon the crumbling walks of Camelot to the silent music of Arthur's star.

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CHAPTER I

GROPING IN THE TWILIGHT

Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards:
Confusion, and illusion, and relation,
Elusion, and occasion, and evasion?
("Gareth and Lynette" 280-82)*

The central concern of this study of Tennyson's Idylls is suggested by such words as confusion, illusion, elusion, and evasion. In the above quotation an evasive seer speaks to three confused men. The three confused men have been confronted by an elusive city which is seen and then not seen as it hangs in a mist. The city is ruled by a mysterious king who, according to a rumor the men have heard, is a "changeling out of Fairyland,/ Who drave the heathen hence by sorcery..." ("Gareth and Lynette" 199-200). At the gate to the city is a gray-bearded seer who tells the men when they ask him whether the city is real:

... it is enchanted ...
For there is nothing in it as it seems
Saving the King, tho' some there be that hold
The King a shadow and the city real. (259-62)

We might, then, say that the Idylls present an environment in which nothing is as it seems, a setting in which "shadow" and "substance" are easily confused, and it might be that here we find the primary source of those ambiguities and that baffling elusiveness which bring so many of the characters of the Idylls to their bitter end and even the Round Table itself to destruction. Elsewhere, in fact, Tennyson

*All line references are to the Cambridge edition of the Complete Poetical Works of Tennyson, edited by W. J. Rolf, and published by Houghton Mifflin of Boston, 1898.

suggests that it is the shadowed world of the Idylls which accounts for the ironic situation of its people, who cannot distinguish "true for false, or false for true." His most explicit statement of this condition comes at the opening of "Geraint and Enid:"

O purblind race of miserable men,
How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a lifelong trouble for ourselves,
By taking true for false, or false for true;
Here, thro' the feeble twilight of this world
Groping, how many, until we pass and reach
That other, where we see as we are seen. (1-7)

But here the shadowed world resolves itself into two worlds, and it appears that what we must attend to is a movement from one to the other, from "this world" to "that other". This is, at once, the scope of the Idylls: "this world" and "that other". The Idylls move from one to the other and thus encompass both. However, the characters in the Idylls are unable to comprehend both at the same time. As they begin to understand one, the other slips away; yet, paradoxically, their relationship is such that neither can be understood without both being understood.

This problem of the two worlds is once more brought to focus in the closing lines of "The Holy Grail." Arthur is speaking. The twelvemonth and a day devoted to the quest of the grail by Arthur's knights have past, and he explains to the small remnant who have returned why he would not have gone on the quest.

And some among you held that if the King
Had seen the sight he would have sworn the vow.
Not easily, seeing that the King must guard
That which he rules, and is but as the hind
To whom a space of land is given to plow,
Who may not wander from the allotted field
Before his work be done, but, being done,
Let visions of the night or of the day

Come as they will; and many a time they come,
 Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
 This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,
 This air that smites his forehead is not air
 But vision -- yea, his very hand and foot --
 In moments when he feels he cannot die,
 And knows himself no vision to himself,
 Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
 Who rose again. (899-915)

Arthur's speech, despite its problematic context, adds to our understanding of the two worlds which form the total environment of the Idylls. Yet it is not satisfying to speak only of "worlds" or "environment." The crisis confronting Arthur is a crisis of vision, of perception, of ways of seeing. It is not only what is seen that concerns Arthur, but how we should act in the light of what we see. In one sense, then, we could say the two worlds of the Idylls are not so much worlds as ways of seeing. Tennyson tells us the Idylls is a poem about the war of "Sense" and "Soul" ("To the Queen" 37). Sometimes he speaks as if we should take these to mean "worlds," the world revealed to the senses and the world revealed in something he speaks of variously as vision or dream; sometimes he speaks as if each were rather a way of perceiving, a condition or state of being. The difficulty in writing about the Idylls is to keep steadily in mind the ambiguity with which Tennyson confronts his characters. Whether we take "sense" and "soul" to refer to "worlds" or to "perception" (and sometimes it is necessary to choose one in preference to the other), it is essential to remember that the action of the Idylls depends on a complex inter-relationship of attitudes, states of being, and conditions of existence depicted by Tennyson as the characters and world of his poem.

If, however, we think of "sense" and "soul" as worlds, Arthur's speech tells us something of their inter-relationship and of the problem it creates for the people who live in that two-fold environment. Once the world of soul is penetrated it becomes the "real" world; it takes on substance. The world of sense loses its substance and fades away. Earth is not earth, air is not air, and light is not light. The world of sense becomes the "vision." Yet both worlds are real and both worlds are included in the Idylls. However, as the characters in the Idylls move toward one world they tend to lose sight of the other, and their elusive environment is the source of much of their illusion.

This thesis, then, will discuss the illusions of the characters in the Idylls as well as the deceptive two-world environment of sense and soul which is the primary source of their illusion. It will discuss characters who are sensual and who attempt to escape the world of soul by retreating to the world of sense. It will discuss characters who embrace a spurious spirituality as they attempt to escape from the world of sense and penetrate the world of soul. Lastly, it will look at certain characters, chief among whom is Dagonet, the fool, who finds a solution to the problem of the two-world environment. Wisdom is revealed in folly as the fool achieves a solution to a problem that baffles even King Arthur himself as well as his chief knight, Lancelot.

Although our concern is primarily with the characters of the Idylls and their relationship to their two-world environment, it might be well to point out that a study of deception in Tennyson's

poem could involve a good deal more. Tennyson is himself a Riddler and his poem is a riddle which is as elusive as the environment its characters are confronted with. It is beyond our scope, however to become involved in discussions of the problematic and difficult subject of the poet's intention and the reader's perception and ultimately of theories of poetic creation. The Idylls could be said to be, to borrow a phrase from Churchill, "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." Tennyson, the Riddler, has wrapped his riddle of sense and soul in the mystery of a two-world environment inside the enigma of a poem. This thesis will concern itself with the riddle and the mystery as well as with the characters who grope in this mysterious two-world environment and are faced with the riddle of sense at war with soul.

CHAPTER II

THE PURBLIND RACE

This chapter will show the all-pervasiveness of the theme of deception (and its necessary corollary: deceptiveness) in the Idylls by examining a number of key passages, characters, and situations in the Idylls. Deception in this thesis is used in its broadest sense to include not only deliberately misleading acts of disguise, trickery, guile, and fraud; but also any situation, person, or object which in its ambiguities or mystery presents a baffling or confusing or contradictory appearance. In other words, the term deception includes not only intentional deceit but unintentional or inherent deceptiveness as well.

The Idylls abound in both types of deception. A good deal of intentional deceit is practised both with malicious intent and without malicious intent. Vivien is the best example of someone who is intentionally and maliciously deceitful. She gains entry to Camelot by a series of lies and disguises. At the court of Mark we learn that she is a harlot, that her father died in battle fighting against Arthur, and that she loves Mark and prefers his "narrow grizzled fork" to Arthur's golden beard ("Merlin and Vivien" 37-61). At Camelot she pretends to be a maiden seeking protection for her virginity. She tells the queen that her father died fighting for Arthur and that she is presently fleeing from Mark who wants to rape her ("Merlin and Vivien" 66-85).

She gains a rather easy admittance to the court where she

can begin work towards her crowning achievement, the seduction and ruin of Merlin described in "Merlin and Vivien." Merlin is the wise man of the Idylls and is referred to as

...the most famous man of all those times,
Merlin, who knew the range of all their arts,
Had built the King his havens, ships and halls,
Was also bard, and knew the starry heavens;
The people call'd him wizard. (164-68)

When Vivien finds out Merlin knows a charm of woven paces and waving hands which can put a person in a permanent trance and make him invisible to all but the charmer, she is determined to learn it and use it on him. She employs all her malicious deceitfulness to scheme a long and very carefully laid out plot. At first she plays with him

with slight and sprightly talk,
And vivid smiles, and faintly-venom'd points
Of slander, glancing here and grazing there. (169-71)

As he grows tolerant of her she begins "to break her sport with graver fits,/ Turn red or pale," and to sigh in his presence or gaze upon him with "a fixt devotion" (178-81). He feels the flattery, and as he begins to "half believe her true," a premonition of his impending doom seizes him and there falls on him "a great melancholy" (184-86). Perceiving his weakness she strikes in earnest. She is as treacherous as any Cleopatra or Delilah in her gown that reveals instead of hides as it clings

about her lissome limbs,
In color like the satin-shining palm
On sallows in the windy gleams of March. (221-23)

She kisses his feet, slides up his knees and curves an arm about his neck and says, "I clothe myself with wisdom" (253), as she draws

The vast and shaggy mantle of his beard
 Across her kneck and bosom to her knee,
 And call[s] her self a gilded summer fly
 Caught in a great old tyrant spider's web,
 Who mean[s] to eat her up in that wild wood
 Without one word. (255-60)

Finally Merlin yields:

To what request for what strange boon ...
 Are these your pretty tricks and fooleries,
 O Vivien, the preamble? yet my thanks,
 For these have broken up my melancholy. (262-65)

But Vivien does not ask the boon yet. She reminds Merlin of her many kind services of the past few days and of his unthankfulness and she asks her boon only after he confesses his suspicions of her and apologizes.

Your pardon, child.
 Your pretty sports have brighten'd all again.
 And ask your boon, for boon I owe you thrice
 Once for wrong done you by confusion, next
 For thanks it seems till now neglected, last
 For these your dainty gambols; wherefore ask,
 And take this boon(302-08)

She has him begging her to ask a boon so she asks, as a token of his love, to be told the secret of the charm of woven paces and waving hands. A battle of wits ensues to which Vivien adds tears, threats, a song about trusting not at all or all in all, countless rebukes, angry accusations, more tears, oaths, and flatteries as well as several outright lies until Merlin, "overtalked and overworn," tells her the charm and sleeps. It is his last sleep, for he no sooner closes his eyes than Vivien employs the charm upon him, and shrieking out "O fool!" she departs leaving the forest echoing "fool!" behind her.

Vivien is the arch deceiver in the Idylls and is skillful

in all forms of deceit. She skillfully assumes the disguise of the distressed virgin to gain admittance to Camelot. She is convincing even in gross lies as when she tells Merlin she loves him and will not use the charm against him. Although Merlin is never convinced that Vivien really loves him he is convinced that Vivien thinks she loves him (481). Furthermore, he is apparently convinced that Vivien has no intention of using the charm against him but might in a fit of anger or jealousy use it against him (519-23). And so he hesitates to tell Vivien the charm, not because she is basically wicked (which she is), but because she is emotionally unstable (which she is not). She is a cunning flatterer as she kisses Merlin's feet or plays with his beard and makes it a symbol of wisdom. When the two have a dispute and she almost defeats her purpose she can skillfully bring about a conciliation by playing on Merlin's sympathies and in the end use the dispute to her advantage.

Vivien's deceit is both intentional and malicious. Gareth also practices an intentional deceit but without malicious intent. He assumes three disguises in "Gareth and Lynette" and has a different motive for each. His first disguise, which he assumes out of obedience to his mother, is that of a farmer. The only condition upon which his mother will permit him to go to Camelot is that he remain unknown and serve as kitchen-knave for a twelvemonth and a day, after which time he may reveal his identity and become a knight. Merlin intercepts him at the gate to the city, informs him that Arthur "cannot brook the shadow of any lie" (286), and rebukes him for his intentions. He makes amends by informing Arthur that he is not really a farmer and requests that he be permitted to assume

the disguise of a kitchen-knave until such time as his real identity can be made known. Arthur grants permission, and Gareth keeps the disguise even after he is secretly knighted, and when the proud Lynette comes, Arthur and Gareth combine in a little game of deceit. Arthur cannot brook the shadow of a lie but apparently he can practice it against others. However, this is intentional deceit with a benevolent intent. The ultimate motive is to teach Lynette a lesson in humility. She comes to Camelot and proudly demands to have Lancelot, and Arthur gives her what appears to be a kitchen-knave. Deceit here becomes a teaching device.

At the end of the idyll Gareth assumes one more disguise. He assumes the guise of Lancelot for his combat with Night, or Death, and hopes this will arouse fear in his opponent. The motive here is mainly self defense, although his aim is the destruction of Death; so from the viewpoint of Death, he has a malicious intent. Gareth wins the contest of swords, but had it been a contest of disguises Death would have won easily, for he too wears a disguise and it is much more deceptive than Gareth's.

Another example of intentional deceit without malice would be Merlin's confusing triplets:

Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow in the sky!
A young man will be wiser by and by;
An old man's wit may wander ere he die.

Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow on the lea!
And truth is this to me, and that to thee;
And truth or clothed or naked let it be.

Rain, sun, and rain! and the free blossom blows;
Sun, rain, and sun! and where is he who knows?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes.

("The Coming of Arthur" 401-10)

The "Riddling of the Bards" would be classified as intentional deceit for purposes of teaching and so could be either malicious or benevolent.

The list of intentionally deceitful acts in the Idylls is a lengthy one. It includes the actions of men like the slanderous Garlon, the cunning Limours, and the cat-like King Mark. It also includes the innocent Enid and her deception of Limours, as well as Lancelot disguised at the tournament. The list of intentionally deceptive acts is long, but the other type of deception which we referred to as unintentional or inherent deceptiveness is even more pervasive in the Idylls. The Idylls abound in situations, persons, and objects which by their ambiguities or mystery present a baffling or confusing or contradictory appearance to man. These situations, persons, and objects have, as it were, an inherent deceptiveness in themselves, at least when viewed by man with his limited perception.

Arthur, himself, is such a figure. His birth is a mystery. Bedevere tells a story which makes King Uther Arthur's father and Queen Ygerne his mother, but biological evidence is sadly lacking, for Uther and Ygerne were both of dark complexion and Arthur is fair. Bellicent, too, tells a story which she claims was told to her by Bleys on his death bed. According to her story Arthur was borne to shore by a great wave of the sea on a night in which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost. The latter story is the more fitting of the two, for Arthur is a strange union of heaven and earth. Tennyson defines him in the epilogue, "To the Queen;" as "Ideal manhood closed in real man"(38). He is a sort of Christ -- an incarnate God, come in Darwinian times and so appropriately yielded

up by the sea, the source of all life the evolutionists tell us. However, Merlin who is wiser than Bleys, will neither deny nor confirm his story. Leodogran, who has domestic reasons for wanting to know Arthur's birth, is finally favoured with a dream which convinces him Arthur is a rightful king but does not reveal any information about his origin. Arthur is no ordinary king and cannot be accepted for the ordinary hereditary reasons; but must be accepted for his accomplishments and for what he represents. Gareth, in "Gareth and Lynette," accepts Arthur for the right reasons when he accepts him because Arthur has

swept the dust of ruin'd Rome
From off the threshold of the realm, and crush'd
The idolaters, and made the people free. (133-35)

If Arthur's birth presents perplexities to the Camelot society, his very existence presents even greater perplexities. To Gareth, as we just noted, he represents freedom. To the unrepentant Guinevere he represents the very opposite of freedom, for he swears men "to vows impossible" ("Lancelot and Elaine" 130), and has tied her with a bond that does not permit her to love Lancelot freely. Lancelot realizes that "there lives/ No greater leader" ("Lancelot and Elaine" 315-16) but discovers he cannot follow him. To Tristram he was once a God and then became a man. To the Red Knight he is a hypocrite and to Pellam he is a religious rival. To Dagonet Arthur is the king of fools. To the repentant Guinevere he is "the highest and most human too" ("Guinevere" 644). Arthur has no intentions of deceiving, yet he is more deceptive than those who intentionally deceive.

Both the king and his city have an inherent deceptiveness that baffles the populace. This deceptiveness is vividly brought out in the scene in which Gareth and his two men approach the gate of Camelot and meet the ancient Seer, Merlin. From the viewpoint of intentional deceit and inherent deceptiveness this passage is one of the most exciting in the Idylls. Three men, Gareth and his two servants, steal away early in the morning. Although they steal away, they go with permission. The men are disguised to deceive Arthur and his court, but their deceit is prompted by love and obedience rather than malice. They approach Camelot, a deceptive city which they are not certain exists and which might be only a mirage, for it appears to be constantly in a mist, sometimes partially hidden and sometimes hidden completely. The city is ruled by Arthur, the deceptive king who, according to one rumor, is an elf from fairy land. Sculptured on the gate to the city is elaborate and deceptive art work, which, after it is gazed at for a time, takes on life and moves. As the three gaze at this living art, a blast of music peals from out the city and from the base of this sculptured gate steps the artist himself. Gareth tells him his lie and asks to be told the truth about the city and its king. The solemn Seer assumes the mask of a mocker and responds:

Son, I have seen the good ship sail
Keel upward, and mast downward, in the heavens,
And solid turrets topsy-turvy in the air;
And here is truth, but an it please thee not,
Take thou the truth as thou hast told it me.
For truly, as thou sayest, a fairy king
And fairy queens have built the city, son;
They came from out a sacred mountain-cleft
Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand,

And built it to the music of their harps.
 And, as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son,
 For there is nothing in it as it seems
 Saving the King; tho' some there be that hold
 The King a shadow, and the city real.
 Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass
 Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become
 A thrall to his enchantments, for the King
 Will bind thee by such vows as is a shame
 A man should not be bound by, yet the which
 No man can keep; but, so thou dread to swear,
 Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide
 Without, among the cattle of the field.
 For an ye heard a music, like enow
 They are building still, seeing the city is built
 To music, therefore never built at all,
 An therefore built for ever. (249-75)

The inverted ship and the topsy-turvey turrets are reflections in the sky -- mirages, if you like. Merlin opens his speech with a description of two mirages he has seen. On the surface, his mentioning the mirages could suggest that the Seer sees things which do not exist and, therefore, as a Seer, he is unreliable. But the fact is mirages can be seen even though they have no physical reality. Merlin is attesting to the deceptiveness of appearances and suggesting, perhaps, that just as a ship can appear to float upside down, or a solid turret appear to be flipped over in mid air, a prince can appear as a tiller of the soil. But more than this, he is answering Gareth's question. Gareth wants to know if the city and its king really exist, and Merlin, in his own way, answers that they are mirages. That is precisely what they are. Just as the upside down ship is a reflection of the real ship, Camelot is a reflection of the real city -- the ideal city. Camelot is a replica of "that other," but it is not "that other." It is stone touched by art and brought

into harmony with music and so made to imitate the ideal. Thus, it is a mirage when viewed from the ideal. Arthur, on the other hand, is the ideal made into flesh. He is "Ideal manhood closed in real man" ("To the Queen" 38). He, too, is a mirage, but of the opposite kind the city is. Because he is the ideal, he is a mirage when viewed from the world of sense.

The city is built by a fairy king and fairy queens from a sacred mountain-cleft in the east. A note in the St. Martin Literature Series edition of "Gareth and Lynette" (p.69) suggests:

The building of the city may represent the growth of civilization, especially in its higher spiritual and aesthetic phases. The fairy king and fairy queens, who have come from the sacred mountain-cleft, that is, Mount Parnassus, are the arts, mythologies, and religions, which have come from the east to wield their potent influences upon the upbuilding of spiritual life.

I would accept this as a possible reading, although the fairy king could also refer to Christ and the fairy queens to Faith, Hope and Charity, who are building the heavenly city and, therefore, also build Camelot, for it is patterned after their city.

Camelot is a city built to music. This suggests that it is governed by the ethereal -- by the spiritual -- and that it is utterly dependent on harmony and can exist only as long as there is harmony. It can be destroyed by a rift within the lute.

The city is enchanted, for nothing in it is real except the king. Merlin is looking at the city and the king from the viewpoint of the ideal. From the viewpoint of the ideal, Arthur is real and Camelot a mirage; but from the viewpoint of the material world, Camelot is real and Arthur is a mirage. That is why some take the

city to be real and the king a shadow. Both the king and the city are deceptive for both are involved in the total environment -- in both the worlds of sense and soul.

Gareth, having come to the gate, has two alternatives. He can remain outside among the cattle, as his mother wanted him to do in the first place, and be a success; or, he can come into the city and be almost a certain failure for he will be forced to take vows which, according to Merlin, no man can keep. But Merlin is mistaken. Gareth enters the city and is a success. He is one of the few successful knights of the Round Table. Arthur's vows are not impossible as Merlin suggests here, and as Guinevere and Tristram will claim later. Gareth keeps them; Edyrn keeps them; and little Dagonet, the fool, lives them better than even Arthur himself.

The scene is a fascinating study of deception, for it weaves together both the intentional deceit of Gareth and the Seer with the inherent deceptiveness of Camelot and Arthur. Another scene equally fascinating occurs at the end of the same idyll when Gareth defeats Death. Death turns out to be a young boy disguised as a terrible monster. His deceit is both intentional and malicious, for he uses it to keep Lyonors prisoner. However, on the allegorical level, the deceptiveness of Death is inherent in Death itself. Death is involved in both worlds of the two-world environment and confronts the characters of the Idylls with a problem of perception, for the appearance of Death changes remarkably depending on the viewpoint of the viewer. When viewed from the world of sense, Death appears as a horrible and unconquerable monster, but when viewed from the

world of soul he is a blooming boy -- the promise of new life. And so Death becomes Life when the viewpoint of the viewer is changed. Whether Death appears as a horrible monster or a blooming boy depends on how we see him. The problem is one of vision.

The result of deceit and deceptiveness is illusion. There is much deceit in the Idylls, and more deceptiveness, and even more illusion, for man, because of his limited perception, is prone to illusion. It is safe to say that all the characters in the Idylls are deceived part of the time and a good many are deceived all of the time.

Balin is one of the more tragic victims of illusion. He possesses the cardinal virtue of honesty. Arthur tells him in "Balin and Balan," "Thōu hast ever spoken truth;/ Thy too fierce manhood would not let thee lie" (70-71). But this too fierce manhood which will not let him lie is also, ironically, the source of much of his trouble. He possesses a violent temper which he has difficulty curbing; but, realizing his problem, he seeks a cure and naturally turns to Lancelot and Guinevere, who represent courtesy and "stately-gentleness," for his source of guidance and inspiration. He assumes that courtesy and gentleness are indicative of a high purity, and this is his illusion. He is partially undeceived when he catches sight of and overhears Guinevere and Lancelot in the garden of roses and lilies where they behave more like "damsel and lover" (277) than queen and subject. He is then completely and maliciously undeceived by the deceivers Garlon and Vivien. However, Balan succeeds in convincing him just before they die together that Guinevere is as

pure as their own mother. Balin dies with this illusion but he is happier for it.

An intriguing series of paradoxes emerges from this particular study of deception. In Balin we can see a peculiar combination of fierceness, honesty, and illusion which have an apparent cause and effect relationship. In Lancelot and Guinevere courtesy and gentleness have a similar relationship to deceptiveness. The malicious deceivers become for the moment "undeceivers" to achieve the malice they intend. And, finally, illusion produces happiness in an honest man.

The Pelleas-Ettarre-Gawain triangle as related in "Pelleas and Ettarre" is also an intriguing study of deception in which three deceived people interact. Pelleas, the tragic figure, is deceived by both Ettarre and Gawain. He is deceived by both Ettarre's inherent deceptiveness and her intentional deceit. When he first saw her

The beauty of her flesh abash'd the boy,
As tho' it were the beauty of her soul;
For as the base man, judging of the good
Puts his own baseness in him by default
Of will and nature, so did Pelleas lend
All the young beauty of his own soul to hers. (74-79)

In a sense, his own goodness is responsible for his illusion. Pelleas immediately falls in love with Ettarre and when she intentionally deceives him into believing she will love him if he fights for her and wins the circlet, he is an easy victim.

Pelleas is also deceived by Gawain, who promises to win Ettarre for him and then enjoys her himself. Gawain is not deceived by Ettarre (he was by Elaine) because she is like him. Perhaps because he has taken his eyes off the world of soul he can see the world of sense more clearly. However, although Gawain is deceived

by neither Pelleas nor Ettarre, he probably suffers from the gravest illusion of the three. He totally misapprehends Arthur and the principles he stands for. He is right when he admonishes Pelleas for defaming the brotherhood of the Round Table by his subservient behaviour towards Ettarre, but then he promptly defames the brotherhood even more by breaking his word to Pelleas. Arthur said earlier, in "The Coming of Arthur," "Man's word is God in man" (132). Gawain goes back on his word. He denies the God in him.

Ettarre is deceived by both the intentional deceit of Gawain and the unintentional deceptiveness of Pelleas. She believes Gawain when he says he has slain Pelleas and rewards him generously. However, because of her limited perception she fails to see the virtue in Pelleas before it is too late and she pines away the rest of her life.

Geraint, too, suffers from an illusion -- a pathetic kind of illusion. He is deceived by his wife as he takes her to be false in spite of the fact that she is the most loyal wife in the Idylls. Her deceptiveness is totally unintentional; in fact, it is non-existent. The cause of Geraint's illusion is not inherent in the person that deceives him, but in Geraint himself. The source of his illusion lies in a combination of pride and jealousy. He is overly protective of his wife and when he hears the faintest whisper of a rumor of Guinevere's unfaithfulness he removes Enid from the court and moves back to his own principedom under pretence that he wants to restore justice -- an act of intentional deceit on his part. Arthur believes his lie; in fact, Arthur feels reprov'd for not

restoring justice more quickly to his own realm ("Geraint and Enid" 356). So Geraint departs with Enid to his principedom but the moment he arrives he falls into an idle uxoriousness,

Forgetful of his promise to the King,
Forgetful of the falcon and the hunt,
Forgetful of the tilt and tournament,
Forgetful of his glory and his name,
Forgetful of his principedom and its cares.
("The Marriage of Geraint" 50-54)

Then, while in the process of awakening from a long night's sleep, he half hears his wife say something about her being no true wife and he immediately departs without any further investigation on his "quest/ Of honor, where no honor can be gained" ("Geraint and Enid" 702-03). Geraint had said earlier, in "The Marriage of Geraint," while speaking of himself and Enid in Yniol's crumbling castle:

I do rest,
A prophet certain of my prophecy,
That never shadow of mistrust can cross
Between us. (813-16)

He was wrong, and he is often wrong. He tells Enid in "Geraint and Enid:"

Ye are wedded to a man,
Not all mismated with a yawning clown,
But one with arms to guard his head and yours
With eyes to find you out however far,
And ears to hear you even in his dreams. (425-29)

He does not see himself as he is seen. A "yawning clown" is an apt description of him. Yawning is apt because he loves to sleep. When we first met him he was late for a hunt, presumably because he had slept in. He is half asleep when he misunderstands Enid. He is anything but alert as he rides through the wilderness behind his wife. Clown, too, is an appropriate term for a physically large,

almost grotesque knight doting on his wife and forgetting all his other duties. His bragging that he can defend himself has a touch of sardonic humor, for without Enid's trickery in deceiving Limours, Geraint would be locked up in a dungeon now. Similarly, his having "eyes to find you out" and ears "to hear you even in his dreams" reflects that he is totally deceived about himself and about her. She is the most honest wife in the Idylls. She is mismated with a yawning clown. However, the yawning clown finally realizes his wife is honest. In spite of all his stupidity and pride, Geraint's illusion is resolved, and he lives happily with his wife until he dies honorably in battle "fighting for the blameless King."

In the middle of the Geraint and Enid story, Tennyson, almost as if in agony, breaks into his poem with:

O purblind race of miserable men,
 How many among us at this very hour
 Do forge a lifelong trouble for ourselves,
 By taking true for false, or false for true.
 ("Geraint and Enid" 1-4)

Tennyson's Idylls show man surrounded by intentional deceit and inherent deceptiveness, and then to heighten the irony, reveal men to be a purblind race who take true for false and false for true. The writer of the book of Job said it in another way: "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7).

CHAPTER III

THE LOW SUN

In the first chapter of this thesis I outlined the two worlds, or two realities, that exist in Tennyson's Idylls. These two realities are of entirely different natures. One reality, to the physical eye of man, is material and temporal, while the other is ethereal and permanent. The one exists within time and space and the other exists out of time and space in something we call eternity; but, nevertheless, the two do not exist apart from each other. They are intrinsically related in the life of a man, and a recognition of the ideal relationship between them is vitally important in the life of an individual.

Tennyson calls these two realities "Sense" and "Soul," and states that their relationship in the Idylls is primarily one of war ("To the Queen" 37). This is probably not the best relationship possible but it might well be the best most men can expect. War is certainly better than some types of peace which we will look at in a moment. Indeed, the only one who achieves a sort of peace which might be better than war, is little Dagonet, the fool, as he dances to the silent music of Arthur's star.

The next three chapters will examine this sense-soul relationship as it is worked out in the lives of individuals in the Idylls. Each chapter will deal with one of three broad categories within which the characters may be viewed. This chapter will study those who find that in their inner being the conflict of sense and soul

is being won, or has already been won, by sense. Sense is the deceiver; the individual the deceived. The next chapter will study those who yield to soul, but in yielding to soul forsake sense. Soul is the deceiver; the individual the deceived. The last chapter will study those who are able to achieve a reasonably satisfactory relationship between the two realities of sense and soul within them.

On the lowest level of those deceived by sense are characters like the Red Knight, Mark, Vivien, Limours, Doorm, and Edyrn before he repents. These no longer experience, or at least show no sign of a conflict within them. The fact that Edyrn repents would indicate that a conflict can be aroused within them, but for the time they have surrendered to sense. The internal war is over; sense is the victor. There is still an external war, at least for the Red Knight, Mark, and Vivien. These are actively opposed to Arthur. But the more dramatic inner conflict is dead.

These six are frequently discussed in terms of the beast image, an image which is appropriate for they are blind to the world of soul. In "The Passing of Arthur" Tennyson draws a distinction between men and animals:

... what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer.
(417-20)

Man differs from the animals in his ability to communicate with God whose existence is in the world of soul. Animals nourish a blind life within the brain; "they are blind to the world of soul."

The most bestial of this group is probably the Red Knight. In "The Coming of Arthur," Tennyson refers to the wolf stealing

and devouring children,

but now and then
Her own brood lost or dead, lent her fierce teat
To human sucklings; and the children, housed
In her foul den, there at their meat would growl,
And mock their foster mother on four feet,
Till, straighten'd, they grew up to wolf-like men,
Worse than the wolves. (27-33)

The Red Knight might well have been such a child. He mauls the swineherd so that Arthur's first question is, "My churl, ... what evil beast/ Hath drawn his claw athwart thy face?" ("The Last Tournament" 62-63). He establishes his Round Table, like Satan, in the North, and swears men to vows the exact opposite of Arthur's. Worse than the beasts, he finds harlots worthy and adulterers honorable. He assumes that anyone who does not openly practise adultery must be a hypocrite. He not only thinks of himself as an animal, but of all other people as animals as well. He is the base man whom Tennyson speaks about in "Pelleas and Ettarre," who "judging of the good,/ Puts his own baseness in him by default/ Of will and nature" (76-78). Thus he is deceived twice: both in himself and in his judgment of others.

Mark is the victim of the same illusions, but he is not nearly as convinced that sense is the only reality. He remains suspicious of soul and so, in a sense, he is not quite as deceived as the Red Knight. When, in "Merlin and Vivien," the minstrel of Caerleon arrives at his court and sings of certain youths in Arthur's court that strive for "an utter purity/ Beyond the limit of their bond" (26-67), he is angered and "half in heart to hurl his cup/ Straight at the speaker" (30-31). Had the speaker spoke of sensuality

at Arthur's court, Mark would have been delighted. What he does not realize is that this utter purity is as harmful as sensuality.

Earlier, in "Gareth and Lynette," Mark requested to be knighted by Arthur so that he could become a member of the Round Table, but he did not qualify. He showed a total lack of understanding of the principles of soul when he attempted to buy his membership into the Round Table with his "cloth of palest gold" (381), and wanted to be accepted on the grounds that he was a king, rather than a man who had proven to be worthy. Wealth and position are not influential factors in the realm of the ideal. The man himself is what counts and he is turned down on the grounds that he is "craven -- a man of plots, / Craft, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings" (423-24).

This, in the final analysis, is probably his downfall. His desire to become a member of the Round Table, although probably prompted largely by selfish motives, would indicate that he has at least some vague awareness of the world of soul. He sees a few faint glimmers of the unseen world of the ideal; but, he is too much a coward to explore them fully and face them squarely. He is a coward even when compared to the Red Knight. The Red Knight will come out and fight and apparently not always make the poor showing he does against Arthur. He did manage to slay one member of the Round Table; however, we are not told how. When he combats the principles of soul as embodied in Arthur, the Red Knight proves most ineffective. However, in a world of animals he is strong, and in his stupidity possesses a certain braveness which is

admirable at least to those who follow him. Mark, however is wiser, and perhaps that is why he is less brave. He steals catlike, even through his own castle. He silently creeps up behind Tristram and cleaves him through the brain. That is "Mark's way," and Mark is proud of it. The Red Knight soon meets his end but Mark survives. Furthermore, he plays a prominent role in the downfall of the Round Table. He sends Vivien to Arthur's court to stir the snakes he is certain must be in the grass at Camelot. It would appear that he is aware that the forces of sense are weaker than the forces of soul in open conflict and so he employs underhanded methods. He is deceived in recognizing only sense within himself and thus stilling the internal struggle; but he possesses enough insight to be effective in the external struggle against Arthur.

In this respect he is like Vivien, but Vivien is the smarter and braver of the two. She is deceived but she is also an arch deceiver and succeeds in overthrowing none other than Merlin, the wise man of the Idylls. Van Dyke calls her the female Iago.¹

A passage in "Merlin and Vivien" reveals a good deal about this paradoxical female. Mark has just asked her if she fears to go to Arthur's court and she responds smiling scornfully:

Why fear? because that foster'd at thy court
 I savor of thy -- virtues? fear them? no,
 As love, if love be perfect, casts out fear,
 So hate, if hate be perfect, casts out fear,
 My father died in battle against the king,
 My mother on his corpse in open field;
 She bore me there, for born from death was I
 Among the dead and sown upon the wind --
 And then on thee! and shown the truth betimes,
 That old true filth, and bottom of the well,
 Where Truth is hidden. Gracious lessons thine,
 And maxims of the mud! "This Arthur pure!
 Great Nature thro' the flesh herself hath made

Gives him the lie! There is no being pure,
 My cherub; saith not Holy Writ the same?"--
 If I were Arthur, I would have thy blood.
 Thy blessing, stainless King! I bring thee back,
 When I have ferreted out their burrowings,
 The hearts of all this Order in mine hand --
 Ay -- so that fate and craft and folly close,
 Perchance, one curl of Arthur's golden beard.
 To me this narrow grizzled fork of thine
 Is cleaner-fashion'd -- Well, I loved thee first;
 That warps the wit. (38-61)

She taunts Mark for being afraid and tells him that, although she has been raised in his court and been influenced by him she has not learned his fear. She is not the coward Mark is, for what she refers to as a "perfect hate" drives away all fear. She understands love, at least to the extent that she knows it could have the same effect as hate; but, because she is a person governed by a bestial sensuality, it is natural for her to prefer hate. She was born from death and sown upon the wind. These vivid images recall passages in both Milton and the Bible. The phrase, "born from death," bring to mind the yelling monsters Satan meets at the gates of hell who are the children of Sin and Death (Paradise Lost, II, 790-800). The phrase, "sown upon the wind," echoes the biblical phrase, "they have sown the wind, and shall reap the whirlwind" (Hosea, 8:7); and, recalls the familiar biblical image of chaff being blown by the wind, as in Psalms 1:4 where it is used to describe the ungodly. Sin, death, retribution, and ungodliness are all appropriate associations for Vivien.

Following the logic of her warped wit she argues playfully and with the intention of flattering Mark, but also partly from conviction, that truth is hidden in the filth at the bottom of the

well of sensuality, and so, because Mark is a sensual man and Arthur a spiritual one (or so she assumes), Mark must be closer to the truth. She uses both Nature and the Bible to prove that purity is unattainable; and, because it is unattainable, she argues man is deceived in striving for it. Man is basically sensual and so should give full reign to his sensual impulses, as Mark does. Man's place is in the filth at the bottom of the well of sensuality, and because Mark gropes about there, she calls him the stainless king -- he is unstained by any inhuman purity. Arthur strives for a purity, which, in her eyes, is not man's; but she is confident that she can seduce even him. She, of course, totally misunderstands Arthur and the principles he stands for. She playfully tells Mark that loving him warps her wit, and there is more truth in this statement than she realizes.

Vivien is deceived, but she is also a deceiver. She raises little suspicion as she gains access to the court of Arthur. Guinevere is suspicious until Lancelot tells her, "Let her be" ("Merlin and Vivien" 127). She makes no headway in her effort to seduce Arthur ("Merlin and Vivien" 153-58), but neither does she arouse enough suspicion to be sent from the court. She is wise enough to realize the futility of her efforts. She gives up on Arthur after a brief initial attempt and decides to tempt Merlin instead. She is completely successful with him and soon his total ruin is achieved and Camelot crumbles more quickly. She is also responsible for the uncovering of the Lancelot-Guinevere affair. She is lurking near by and overhears Lancelot and Guinevere plan their last meeting for a time when Arthur will be away.

Vivien's success is due largely to the fact that Camelot is

weakened by a concealed sensuality festering within; but it also comes as a result of her wily nature and her strong conviction that the forces of sense are stronger in man than any spiritual forces can ever be in a body of flesh and blood. She expresses this conviction in her song.

The fire of heaven has kill'd the barren cold,
And kindled all the plain and all the wold.
The new leaf ever pushes off the old.
The fire of heaven is not the flame of hell.

Old priest, who mumble worship in your quire --
Old monk and nun, ye scorn the world's desire,
Yet in your frosty cells ye feel the fire!
The fire of heaven is not the flame of hell.

The fire of heaven is on the dusty ways.
The wayside blossoms open to the blaze.
The whole wood-world is one full peal of praise.
The fire of heaven is not the flame of hell.

The fire of heaven is lord of all things good,
And starve not thou this fire within thy blood,
But follow Vivien thro' the fiery flood!
The fire of heaven is not the flame of hell!

After her song she tells her squire:

This fire of heaven,
This old sun-worship, boy, will rise again,
And beat the Cross to earth, and break the King
And all his table. ("Ealin and Balan" 450-53)

The song expresses an unflinching conviction in the ultimate victory of sense. The song, however, contains only partial truths at best. Stanzas one and three are pleasant descriptions of the effects of the sun on nature and would be quite agreeable to most people if sung by someone other than Vivien. Stanza two could be taken as an attack on asceticism and as such it is in agreement with the general tone of the Idylls. But in stanza four what we suspect all along is made clear. The fire she speaks of and incorrectly links

with the sun is the crass sensuality that she, Mark, and his court stand for. As such it is the flame of hell. But she is right in her predictions. It does destroy Arthur and his Round Table. Whether or not it has "beat the Cross to earth" is debatable, but no one can deny it has done a lot of pounding on it and inflicted some damage.

Limours and Doorm, whom we meet in "Geraint and Enid," also exist on the level of bestiality. Unlike the Red Knight, Mark, and Vivien, these two are not actively hostile toward Arthur. They are content to enjoy their sensual pleasures in their own little domains and are apparently not interested in coming into open conflict with Arthur and his knights. But Arthur's court is still near the peak of its strength in "Geraint and Enid" and only the very foolish would challenge it.

Limours is first introduced to us by Yniol, who describes him in "The Marriage of Geraint" as

A creature wholly given to brawls and wine,
Drunk even when he woo'd; and be he dead
I know not, but he past to the wild land. (440-42)

A little later, in "Geraint and Enid," we meet Limours in this wild land. He is the barbarian we expect him to be. The pavement echoes as he approaches with his roisterers the room Geraint and Enid are occupying, and he crashes open the door driving it backward to the wall as he barges into the room. However, he is a good actor too, and he becomes a very polished gentleman when he notices Enid, the girl he tried to marry and still wants to have. He is the life of the party with his witty speech that sparkles "like a gem/ Of fifty facets" (294-95) as he takes the word and plays upon it. In

keeping with the role of the gentleman he is playing, Limours asks Geraint's permission to speak to Enid; and, Geraint, being his usual slow-witted self, grants it easily. The former suitor of Enid tells her,

... fear me not; I call mine own self wild,
But keep a touch of sweet civility
Here in the heart of waste and wilderness. (311-13)

He then proceeds to outline his plot to seize her husband, throw him into a dungeon, and make love to her. This may be sweet but it is hardly civil. However, his plot fails. The bungling Geraint is easily duped by the wily Limours and would have been a certain victim, but the innocent and unsuspected Enid comes to the rescue and tricks Limours. The deceiver becomes the deceived. The scene is a fascinating one in terms of deceit and irony.

We also encounter Doorm in "Geraint and Enid." If Limours shows that sensuality can take on the appearance of fine manners, Doorm places it back in its normal environment. He is a loud and brawny brute. He is a wild man in a wild land who consumes large draughts of wine and lets "his cheek/ Bulge with the unswallowed piece" (629-30) even as he speaks to a lady. Unlike Limours, he practises no manners or courtesies; he acts only on the impulse of his brute nature. He feels that fire Vivien sings about and lets it burn. Guinevere observes later on, in "Guinevere,"

... manners are not idle, but the fruit
Of loyal nature and of noble mind. (333-34)

Doorm has neither a loyal nature nor a noble mind and he feigns none.

He is himself.

Edyrn, too, belongs in this company. He succeeds, with his slanderous treachery, in bringing his uncle, Yniol, to ruin. But he repents, indicating that this sensual fire Vivien sings about can be extinguished, or at least controlled. Edyrn's conversion is one of Arthur's major accomplishments and will be studied more closely in the final chapter of this thesis. Edyrn has changed completely. Instead of contributing to, he now helps Arthur rid his realm of, what Arthur refers to as "this common sewer of all my realm" ("Geraint and Enid" 894).

This rather pungent sewer image warrants special attention and is significant in making a differentiation that must be made in this chapter. Tennyson uses this image again, late in life, in a little poem entitled, "Happy," and sub-titled, "The Leper's Bride." In this poem the bride tells her leperous husband that the body of flesh is naught but a "Satan-haunted ruin;" a "little city of sewers" (34). If you think of the digestive system in man with its yards and yards of intestines this image can be taken literally. But it also implies that the body of flesh is corrupt and all its desires depraved. So, in a sense, sensuality is sewage. Yet Tennyson was not so naive as to think that one could dispose of it so easily. Furthermore, he realized that this description would neither suit all viewpoints, nor be applicable to all forms of sensuality. In "Balin and Balan," the "deep hued and many folded" garden rose

becomes a symbole of sensuality (264-65). Now even a blind man can differentiate between sewage and roses and anything that can be symbolized by both must be of an illusive nature.

There are, however, several differences that should be mentioned in Tennyson's use of these two images. In the first instance, where sensuality and sewers are linked, Arthur is speaking. In the second instance Guinevere is speaking. Whether sensuality is repulsive or attractive depends to a large extent on the viewer. And there is an even more significant difference. Arthur is speaking of the sensuality of Doorm and others like him, while Guinevere refers to her own attraction for Lancelot. Both refer to a sensuality, and both, in the Idylls, prove to be destructive, but there is a difference. The Red Knight, Mark, Vivien, Limours, and Doorm practise a sensuality which is self-centered and selfish. Like Vivien they are governed by hate rather than love. In her song, Vivien accuses the religious ascetics of starving the sensual fire within them. These do not starve, they surfeit. Ironically, by surfeiting they cloy their appetities, while the ascetics by starving, keep their appetites very much alive. Both surfeiting and starving are, in the end, harmful to the body. Both are sins against Nature.

The Lancelot-Guinevere affair is prompted largely by what could also be called sensuality (the desire of body for body), but theirs is not an entirely selfish affair. They are motivated by a genuine love for each other. They want neither to starve nor surfeit.

Their sin is not against body. It is not against Nature, or anything natural. It is against a law imposed upon them; the law of marriage.

The Red Knight, Mark, Vivien, Limours, and Doorm represent the lowest form of sensuality. They are the beasts in the Idylls and wallow in a sewer of sensuality. They are the adversaries of the Round Table. However, sensuality is not limited to the adversaries of the Round Table. It exists within the Round Table society, and, although not as crude as that practised by the five mentioned above, it shares a much larger blame for the ultimate ruin of Arthur and the Round Table. Two high ranking knights of the Round Table, Gawain and Tristram, are basically sensual. Although they swear Arthur's vows and share for a time his high principles, they lose sight of soul and embrace an entirely sensual existence.

Gawain, in the Idylls, does not enjoy the high position he normally enjoys in the Arthurian myth, but he does retain some respect. When we first meet him he is accompanying Bellicent with Modred to Leodogran. When he and Modred are asked to leave the chamber because Bellicent wants to speak of private things, Gawain skips off singing a song while Modred holds his ear to the door. In "Gareth and Lynette" Gawain's shield is compared to Modred's. Modred's is entirely blank but Gawain's is "blazon'd rich and bright" (408) indicating that he has done at least two noble deeds. Furthermore, he ranks fifth among the knights of the Round Table, behind Lancelot, Tristram, Geraint, and Gareth; "but therewithall," adds Tennyson, "Sir Modred's brother and the child of Lot,/ Not often

loyal to his word" ("Lancelot and Elaine" 555-57).

He is known as the "light-of-love" ("Pelleas and Ettarre" 353) and the name is appropriate. In "Lancelot and Elaine" he is persuaded to stay at Astolat largely because he hopes to seduce Elaine; who, he notices, has a dainty face and perfect figure (636-40). When he realizes he will not succeed he bids his farewells and tells Elaine if Lancelot really loves her and brings her to court,

there, I think,
So you will learn the courtesies of the court,
We two shall know each other. (694-96)

He has more success with Ettarre and he takes the opportunity even though he has given his word to win her for Pelleas.

In "The Holy Grail" Gawain is one of the five Grail seekers who is specifically mentioned. Apparently he is the last one to swear but he swears louder than all the rest. He swears because it is the popular thing to do and he is determined to gain all the popularity the situation will afford by making sure everyone hears him. He is also the first to leave the quest, but instead of returning to right human wrongs as Arthur would have him do, he spends the year's leave of absence Arthur grants him to search for the Grail, like the Morning Star in the brotherhood of Night and Day, in a silk pavilion surrounded by merry maidens.

After the twelvemonth and a day have past, and the Grail seekers who survive return to Camelot, Gawain, sensing that Arthur is not convinced that there is any virtue in man's forsaking the world of sense to seek the Grail, says hoping to gain his approval:

My good friend Percival,
 Thy holy nun and thou have driven men mad,
 Yea, made our mightiest madder than our best.
 But by mine eyes and by mine ears I swear,
 I will be deafer than the blue-eyed cat,
 And thrice as blind as any noonday owl,
 To holy virgins in their ecstasies,
 Henceforward. (858-65)

But Arthur's approval is not forthcoming.

'Deafer,' said the blameless King,
 'Gawain, and blinder unto holy things
 Hope not to make thyself by idle vows,
 Being too blind to have desire to see.'

Gawain's world is the physical world of sense. He is a materialist. Guinevere, herself a sensual being, does not accept the diamonds Lancelot wins for her but throws them in the river, for she feels Lancelot has been unfaithful to her and no longer loves her; and, "to loyal hearts the value of all gifts/ Must vary as the giver's" ("Lancelot and Elaine" 1207-08). Not so for Gawain. When he gives the diamond to Elaine to give to Lancelot he says,

For if you love, it will be sweet to give it;
 And if he love, it will be sweet to have it
 From your own hand; and whether he love or not,
 A diamond is a diamond. (688-91).

The phrase, "a diamond is a diamond," is a cliché today. There is an admirable practicality in Gawain's philosophy and it has become popular in our century. Tennyson, however, is careful to tell the reader that Gawain is deceived. To convince the reader of the error of Gawain's ways, Tennyson has Gawain appear as a ghost in "The Passing of Arthur" after the war against Lancelot in which he is slain. Gawain, no longer blind, says:

Hollow, hollow all delight!
 Hail, King! tomorrow thou shalt pass away.
 Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.
 And I am blown along a wandering wind,
 And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight. (34-38)

Like Gawain, Tristram is also not given the high position in the Idylls that he normally holds in the Arthurian myth. Like Gawain, he is basically a sensual man and blind to the unseen world of soul, and so he must necessarily suffer in a poem that is trying to convince men of the reality of this unseen world. Tristram's basic argument is that man is flesh and blood and has no part in the unseen and ideal world of soul. He argues his case in "The Last Tournament." Isolt has just reminded him that he lied when he swore his vow to Arthur, and Tristram responds:

Lied, say ye? Nay, but learnt,
 The vow that binds too strictly snaps itself --
 My knighthood taught me this -- ay, being snapt --
 We run more counter to the soul thereof
 Than had we never sworn. I swear no more.
 I swore to the great King, and am forsworn.
 For once -- even to the height -- I honor'd him.
 "Man, is he man at all?" methought, when first
 I rode from our rough Lyonesse, and beheld
 That victor of the Pagan throned in hall --
 His hair, a sun that ray'd from off a brow
 Like hill-snow high in heaven, the steel-blue eyes,
 The golden beard that clothed his lips with light--
 Moreover, that weird legend of his birth,
 With Merlin's mystic babble about his end
 Amazed me; then, his foot was on a stool
 Shaped as a dragon; he seem'd to me no man,
 But Michael trampling Satan; so I sware,
 Being amazed. But this went by -- the vows'
 O, ay -- the wholesome madness of an hour --
 They served their use, their time; for every knight
 Believed himself a greater than himself,
 And every follower eyed him as a God;
 Till he, being lifted up beyond himself,

Did mightier deeds than elsewhere he had done,
 And so the realm was made. But then their vows --
 First mainly thro' that sullyng of our Queen --
 Began to gall the knighthood, asking whence
 Had Arthur right to bind them to himself?
 Dropt down from heaven? wash'd up from out the deep?
 They fail'd to trace him thro' the flesh and blood
 Of our old kings. Whence then? a doubtful lord
 To bind them by inviolable vows,
 Which flesh and blood perforce would violate;
 For feel this arm of mine -- the tide within
 Red with free chase and heather-scented air,
 Pulsing full man. Can Arthur make me pure
 As any maiden child? lock up my tongue
 From uttering freely what I freely hear?
 Bind me to one? The whole world laughs at it.
 And worldling of the world am I, and know
 The ptarmigan that whitens ere his hour
 Woos his own end; we are not angels here
 Nor shall be. (651-94)

Tristram is obviously bothered by having abandoned his vows but he is prepared to defend his position. He argues that because man is flesh and blood and Arthur's vows express the ideal they bind too strictly and snap themselves. The ideal is something man should not strive for; in fact, the ideal is an illusion. He concludes that his initial experience with Arthur was an illusion. He took Arthur to be some sort of God -- "Michael trampling Satan" -- but discovered he was a man; and once stripped of his "ideal manhood" Arthur is at best a dubious king, for he cannot be traced through the flesh and blood of the old kings. The vows too, because they express the ideal, he takes to be illusions -- a sort of "wholesome madness" that for a time lifted man beyond himself but which could not last because they were unreal. Tristram is not altogether blind. He gets a glimpse of the unseen and ideal world of soul, but concludes

it is an illusion.

Tristram attributes the break down of the Round Table mainly to "that sullyng of our Queen." Arthur attributes, perhaps unjustly, the full blame for the downfall of his kingdom to Guinevere:

Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot;
Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt;
Then others following these my mightiest knights,
And drawing foul ensample from fair names,
Sinn'd also, till the loathsome opposite
Of all my heart had destined did obtain,
And all thro' thee! ("Guinevere" 484-90)

Guinevere's influence is felt throughout the Idylls and most of the sins committed are in some way connected with her sin with Lancelot. Even as the Grail seekers depart on their quest, Guinevere wails as she rides beside Lancelot, "This madness has come on us for our sins" (352). Yet very little is seen of Guinevere in the first ten idylls. The idyll dedicated to her comes after she has repented and is in the convent at Almesbury. Guinevere's pattern of sensual pleasure followed by repentance, follows the pattern of the Soul in "The Palace of Art." However, there are two significant differences. In "The Palace of Art" Tennyson devotes over two-thirds of the poem to the sensual pleasures and a small part to her repentance. In his creation of Guinevere the emphasis is on the repentance. The Soul in "The Palace of Art" does not destroy her palace, but Guinevere breaks all connections with Lancelot.

There are, however, two scenes in the first ten books of the Idylls which stand out vividly as they focus on Guinevere and

reveal her affinity for sense. Both occur when she is with Lancelot. The first occurs in "Balin and Balan" when they meet in a garden of lilies and roses. Lancelot has just marvelled at the beauty of the lilies and Guinevere replies:

Sweeter to me, ... this garden rose
Deep hued and many folded! sweeter still
The wild-wood hyacinth and the bloom of May! (264-66)

The other scene occurs in "Lancelot and Elaine" where Guinevere and Lancelot discuss Arthur. She refers to him scornfully as

Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,
That passionate perfection, my good lord --
But who can gaze upon the sun in heaven? (121-23)

She tells Lancelot,

to me
He is all fault who hath no fault at all.
For who loves me must have a touch of earth;
The low sun makes the color. I am yours
Not Arthur's. (131-35)

Her decision is definite and she is not entirely without the reader's sympathy. If Tristram felt his position could be justified through rational means, how much more can Guinevere's. Her affection for Lancelot is sown in early May among the wild flowers, and like the wild flowers it blossoms into a natural love relationship. Arthur's "ideal manhood" appreciates soul more than body, and apparently Arthur pays little attention to Guinevere's physical needs. He does not satisfy her craving for a touch of earth. This is a natural craving and it is the husband's rightful duty to satisfy this craving. Arthur apparently is failing in this duty and so she looks to Lancelot.

Her sin is neither in having the craving, nor in wanting to satisfy it, but in looking to Lancelot for satisfaction while she is married to Arthur.

She could argue that the marriage vow which binds her was, in effect, forced upon her in the first place. Arthur's proposal was addressed to her father and her father apparently made his decision without consulting her. Neither does Arthur ask her how she feels about the marriage; he assumes she wants to marry him and goes ahead and plans the wedding, making himself the central figure. In spite of this, Guinevere is too noble to try to justify her adultery, or if she does try to justify it for a moment, she never entirely succeeds to her own satisfaction. Her vow binds too tightly but it never quite snaps itself. She repents, even to the extent that she can say with full conviction:

... now I see thee [Arthur] what thou art,
 Thou art the highest and most human too,
 Not Lancelot, nor another. ("Guinevere" 643-45)

This is a far cry from, "who loves me must have a touch of earth;/The low sun makes the color." She now prefers the white lily to the deep hued garden rose, but she probably still loves the latter. Even with this realization of Arthur's greatness she would still have that craving for a touch of earth. Had she come to this realization of Arthur earlier she might have been successful in overcoming her craving -- in quelling it. But the war of sense and soul is not settled satisfactorily with the annihilation of one or the other. The desired result is that sense and soul live in harmony.

Guinevere's solution, in the final analysis, is not much better than Tristram's. Tristram caught a glimpse of the ideal world of soul but concluded that he had been deceived. He chose sense and renounced soul. Guinevere saw, felt, understood, and had a capacity to appreciate the physical world of sense possibly better than anyone in the Idylls; but, she, too, concludes she was deceived. She chooses soul and renounces sense. I do not believe Tennyson intended her decision to represent an entirely satisfactory victory in the war he dramatizes in his poem. It may have been the best possible "victory" under the circumstances, but an entirely satisfactory victory would have meant a harmonious union of Arthur and Guinevere satisfying to both Arthur with his high ideal and Guinevere with her craving for a touch of earth. This is not achieved even after Guinevere's profound realization of her husband's greatness. The best that can be achieved is a hope that they will be united more successfully in that other world.

In Lancelot, the two worlds of sense and soul are fused. Those characters whom we have discussed so far in this chapter are always blind to either sense or soul. They live in one world and experience only one dimension of existence. Lancelot very vividly experiences both. Tristram, in "The Last Tournament" says to Isolt:

... feel this arm of mine -- the tide within
 Red with free chase and heather-scented air,
 Pulsing full man. (685-87)

Lancelot has the same tide pulsing within him and probably with greater force. But, unlike Tristram, Lancelot is also a living

soul ("Lancelot and Elaine" 252) who aspires towards Arthur's high ideals but cannot attain them. It is in Lancelot that this war of sense and soul rages most fearfully.

Allegorical interpretations of the Idylls generally identify Arthur with soul and Guinevere with sense. It is somewhat more difficult to identify Lancelot with any one quality; but, by his position, he could represent the artist symbolically caught between sense and soul. He understands and admires both better than anyone in the Idylls. He is Arthur's chief knight and they fight side by side in the twelve great battles that establish Arthur as king. After one of the later battles Arthur says to Lancelot, "Thou dost not doubt me King,/ So well thine arm hath wrought for me today" ("Coming of Arthur" 125-26). Lancelot replies:

Sir and my leige, ... the fire of God
Descends upon thee in the battle-field.
I know thee for my King! (127-29)

The two then swear "on the field of death a deathless love" (131). Lancelot's love and admiration continue even after he is unfaithful to Arthur. When Lavaine, in "Lancelot and Elaine," asks Lancelot about Arthur's wars he describes them with sincere words of praise for Arthur and concludes,

in this heathen war the fire of God
Fills him. I never saw his like; there lives
No greater leader. (314-16)

When Lavaine and Lancelot ride to Camelot and come within sight of Arthur, Lancelot says,

in me there dwells
 No greatness, save it be some far-off touch
 Of greatness to know well I am not great.
 There is the man. (447-50)

Lancelot recognizes Arthur's greatness and he admires him for it, but he cannot be like Arthur. He is aware of this himself and says at the end of "Lancelot and Elaine," "Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man/ Not after Arthur's heart!" (1408-09). Arthur is "Ideal manhood closed in real man" ("To the Queen" 38). Lancelot is a real man. He needs the same touch of earth that Guinevere needs. He appreciates Arthur for his high ideals and he appreciates Guinevere, fairest of all flesh, for her beauty; and, this latter appreciation is the greater. In spite of his love for Arthur and Arthur's love for him; and in spite of Elaine's love, who, Lancelot realizes, loved him more than Guinevere ("Lancelot and Elaine" 1383-84), Lancelot cannot separate himself from the fairest of all flesh. Only in the end, when the ruin of Camelot is all but complete, and Guinevere decides she will leave Lancelot, are the two separated.

Although sense proves to be somewhat the stronger force, there is never a decisive victor in the war raging in Lancelot. If there had been he would have been more at peace, but as it is, he is consumed in the rage of the battle. This battle is described in "Lancelot and Elaine:"

The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,
 In battle with the love he bare his lord,
 Had marr'd his face and mark'd it ere his time.

Another sinning on such heights with one,
 The flower of all the west and all the world,
 Had been the sleeker for it; but in him
 His mood was often like a fiend, and rose
 And drove him into wastes and solitudes
 For agony, who was yet a living soul. (244-52)

Lancelot, himself, describes it in "The Holy Grail" after he returns from the quest.

... in me lived a sin
 So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure
 Noble, and knightly in me twined and clung
 Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower
 And poisonous grew together, each as each,
 Not to be pluck'd asunder. (769-74)

His hope was to pluck them asunder during his quest of the Grail,
 but he discovered,

while I yearn'd and strove
 To tear the twaine asunder in my heart,
 My madness came upon me as of old,
 And whipt me into waste fields far away. (782-85)

The other characters we discussed in this chapter are all deceived. They are all partially blind and can see only half of what exists at one time. Lancelot can see a lot more. Marlow, the narrator in Conrad's Heart of Darkness, makes a comment on life just after he has witnessed the death of Kurtz in which Kurtz experiences "that supreme moment of complete knowledge."² Marlow says: "Droll thing life is -- that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself -- that comes too late -- a crop of unextinguishable regrets."² For Lancelot life is not a droll thing. He may not experience that supreme moment of complete knowledge but he approaches it. Like Guinevere he has his crop of unextinguishable regrets,

but he gains a good deal more knowledge about himself than Guinevere does about herself. The knowledge is costly and more than can be lived with. When Kurtz experiences that supreme moment of complete knowledge he can only pronounce, "The horror! The horror!"³ and die. When Lancelot approaches it he goes mad. This is the price of being undeceived. Lancelot goes mad but he sees, feels, and partially understands what others do not know even exists.

CHAPTER IV

NO TOUCH OF EARTH

The previous chapter dealt with characters in the Idylls who could not adapt themselves to the deceptive two-world environment of sense and soul. They are keenly aware of the world of sense but the elusive world of soul evades them. Many, like the Red Knight or Doorm, are totally blind to the world of soul and can recognize only the world of sense. Others, like Tristram are at least vaguely aware of the world of soul but they conclude the world of soul is not for man and seek their haven in the world of sense. Lancelot has a clearer perception of the world of soul but discovers his attraction to the world of sense is too great to abide by the high demands of soul. However he tears himself apart trying and dies a holy man ("Lancelot and Elaine" 1418).

This chapter will also discuss characters in the Idylls who cannot adapt themselves to the two-world environment, but for various reasons they go to another extreme. They forsake the world of sense and flee, or attempt to flee, to the world of soul. The previous chapter dealt with characters who, with the exception of Lancelot and possibly Guinevere, were under the illusion that the world of sense was the only world that existed, or at least the only world that had any bearing on man. This chapter will deal with characters who are under the illusion that the world of soul is the only real world and the world men ought to live in. It will deal with characters who despair of the world of sense and seek to find substance in the world of soul.

This chapter will also study Arthur and attempt to discover some causes for his apparent failure. Although in "The Holy Grail," the idyll this chapter will focus on, Arthur advocates remaining in the world of sense and at the end of the idyll he tells the returned Grail seekers he "may not wander from the allotted field/ Before his work be done" (904-05), he is not as effective in his allotted field as he would wish to be. His apparent failure is due at least in part to his inability to perceive clearly the world of sense from his high vantage point so close to the world of soul.

There are three groups of people in the Idylls who attempt to flee from the world of sense: Pellam and his followers; the younger knights the minstrel of Caerleon sings about; and the Grail seekers. The story of Pellam is found in "Balin and Balan." Pellam was a pagan king who sided with Lot against Arthur. When he was defeated, Arthur allowed him to remain king but required him to pay tribute. Pellam concludes that Arthur is successful because he embraces the Christian religion and so he takes

as in rival heat, to holy things,
And finds himself descended from the Saint
Arimathaeon Joseph. (97-99)

Although Arthur's success is Pellam's motive for embracing what he thinks is Christianity, he is not at all like Arthur. Arthur builds his castles on a mountain and clears the forests around him to let in the sunlight. Pellam's halls are built low and appear as little knolls of moss in the high streaming grass that surrounds

his place. Arthur has great feasts at Camelot and he looks for a wife early in his reign; but Pellam eats scarce¹ enough to stay alive, pushes his faithful wife aside, and excludes all women from his court for fear of pollution. He is under the illusion that his asceticism makes him purer than Arthur.

When tribute is demanded Pellam proudly answers, "I have quite foregone/ All matters of the world" (113-14). By "the world" he means the world of sense. And he is right up to a point. He has foregone sunshine, food, women, and money (at least for paying tribute) and these all belong to the physical world of sense. Unless viewed by a man experiencing a vision or a dream, sunshine, food, women, and money belong to the material world -- the world of substance. Pellam wants to forego the world of sense and so he renounces these. He wants to give substance to the world of soul and so he collects relics -- bones of martyrs, thorns from Christ's crown, shivers from His cross, and the spear that pierced His side. These relics are apparently false. The spear, for instance, is much longer than a normal spear and the point of it is painted red ("Balin and Balan" 405-06). But by taking these material relics and attributing to them spiritual significance, Pellam hopes to penetrate the world of soul. As he meditates in his shrine of relics he believes himself in a world of soul that has taken on substance but the substance he sees is bones, thorns, shivers, and spears -- all of which exist in the world of sense. He experiences

no vision. He does not penetrate the world of soul.

Furthermore, Pellam's whole concept of religion is in error. When Balin makes his escape with the spear that allegedly pierced Christ, Pellam cries in his feeble voice what to him is a grave accusation: "Stay, stay him! he defileth heavenly things/ With earthly uses!" (415-16). But heavenly things are meant to be "defiled" with earthly uses. The value of a religion is measured by its earthly usefulness. The main reason Arthur condemns the Grail seekers is that their quest has no earthly usefulness.

Pellam is not the only ascetic in the Idylls. In "Merlin and Vivien" a minsterel of Caerleon informs his audience at the court of Mark

That out of naked knight-like purity
Sir Lancelot worshiped no unmarried girl,
But the great Queen herself, fought in her name,
Swore by her -- vows like theirs that high in heaven
Love most, but neither marry nor are given
In marriage, angels in our Lord's report. (11-16)

When Vivien asks, "And is the fair example follow'd, sir,/ In Arthur's household?" (19-20), the minstrel answers:

Ay, by some few -- aye, truly -- youths that hold
It more beseems the perfect virgin knight
To worship woman as true wife beyond
All hopes of gaining, than as maiden girl.
They place their pride in Lancelot and the Queen.
So passionate for an utter purity
Beyond the limit of their bonds are these,
For Arthur bound them not to singleness.
Brave hearts and clean! and yet -- God guide them!--young.
(21-29)

The young knights suffer from several illusions. They are deceived by the Lancelot-Guinevere relationship. In their innocence,

and probably because of their own goodness, they assume the relationship could never be physically consummated, for Guinevere is married to Arthur. Because the relationship cannot be consummated it smacks of heaven where people "neither marry nor are given/ In marriage." This last reference is to Christ, who said (when a group of Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, asked whose wife a woman who had had seven husbands would be after the resurrection):

The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage:

But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage:

Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. (Luke 20: 34-36)

The knights interpret Christ to mean that there is no sex in that other world, but all He really says is people will not be bound to one another. However, even if they are right in their interpretation, their argument that because there is no sex in the world of soul man should not indulge in sex on earth, does not logically follow. And their further argument that if they do not indulge in sex here they will somehow come closer to the world of soul is fallacious. There is, however, enough apparent truth in it to give it an air of plausibility. Arthur, in his speech in the last few lines of "The Holy Grail," mentions how the world of sense fades away as one approaches the world of soul. The world of soul becomes the reality and the world of sense the vision. However, although the world of sense fades as a person approaches the world

of soul, one cannot enter, as the ascetics attempt to do, the world of soul by fading from the world of sense. The ascetic is successful neither in entering the world of soul nor in really escaping the world of sense. Vivien is right when she sings in "Balin and Balan:"

Old priest, who mumble worship in your quire --
Old monk and nun, ye scorn the world's desire,
Yet in your frosty cells ye feel the fire! (438-40)

The Grail seekers, too, take the approach of the ascetics in their efforts to escape the world of sense. The first person who desires to see the Grail is Percival's sister, a nun, and she sees it only after "she pray'd and fasted, till the sun/ Shone, and the wind blew, thro' her ..." ("The Holy Grail" 98-99). The knights, too, hoping to see the Grail, "Fasted and pray'd even to the uttermost" (132).

There are seven significant characters in "The Holy Grail." Five of the seven are the five Grail seekers who are specifically named: Galahad, Percival, Lancelot, Bors, and Gawain. Percival is the narrator as well, and Ambrosius serves as a listener, a questioner, and a commentator. Arthur is the critic who evaluates the venture and passes final judgment. Of the five Grail seekers Galahad is the most successful in achieving his goal. He not only lives with the Grail constantly in his presence, but is finally ushered into that other world by it. To Percival, Galahad is the hero of the quest -- the man he envies and wishes he could follow. Percival thinks of him as spectacularly successful but Arthur is

not so quick to give his praise. He says, referring to Galahad,

And one hath had the vision face to face,
And now his chair desires him here in vain,
However they may crown him elsewhere.
(896-98 underlining mine)

On the other extreme is Gawain. To Percival he is the outstanding failure. Arthur, also, has only words of condemnation for him. He tells Gawain he is "too blind to have desire to see" (868). Yet, ironically, the blind Gawain and the visionary Galahad have something in common. In "Lancelot and Elaine," when Gawain returns after failing in his quest to find Lancelot, Arthur tells him: "ye shall go no more/ On quest of mine" (711-12). Both Galahad and Gawain are equally useless to Arthur -- Galahad because "his chair desires him ... in vain" and Gawain because he cannot be trusted. In "Merlin and Vivien," Merlin tells of a squire who decorated his shield with a rising eagle and inscribed it with the motto: "I follow fame" (474). Merlin

... took his brush and blotted out the bird,
And made a gardener putting in a graff,
With this for motto, "Rather use than fame." (476-78)

The squire learns his lesson well and becomes a stalwart knight. But neither Galahad nor Gawain learns the lesson. On Merlin's yardstick of usefulness they measure about the same. Neither follows fame but both follow something equally selfish. Galahad desires spiritual experiences and Gawain, sensual. While Galahad "enjoys" his Grail, Gawain enjoys his merry maidens. They are on opposite ends of two extreme poles and so the same distance from the war of

sense and soul in the middle where men ought to be.

Lancelot and Bors get only a faint glimpse of the Grail but at least they return to Arthur to engage once more in righting human wrongs. Lancelot concludes that the quest was not for him but he probably learns more from it than any of the other four. He learns a good deal about himself as he perceives the wholesome and poisonous flowers twined together within him, and experiences a madness come over him as he tries to pluck them asunder. His experiences are as dramatic as Galahad's and more valuable. It would have been interesting if Lancelot rather than Percival had been the narrator of "The Holy Grail."

Bors is the most selfless of the Grail seekers. He would gladly have forgone seeing the Grail if by doing so Lancelot could have had the vision (650-62). When he does get a glimpse of it he is overcome with gratitude:

And then to me, to me,
 ... beyond all hopes of mine,
 Who scarce had pray'd or ask'd it for myself --
 Across the seven clear stars -- O grace to me! --
 In color like the fingers of a hand
 Before a burning taper, the sweet Grail
 Glided and past (686-92)

Both Lancelot and Bors catch glimpses of the Grail but their experiences are somewhat different. Lancelot has, as it were, a "sensual" experience while Bors has more of a "spiritual" experience. Lancelot feels an agony in his body as a madness whips him into waste fields where he is "beaten down by little men" (786). Even

his seeing the Grail is an agonizing experience for it comes in a moment of madness and he swoons as soon as he sees it. For Lancelot, seeing the Grail is a physical experience. The Grail comes out of the world of soul and communicates to him in the world of sense. When he returns to Camelot he has something to say. Like Conrad's Kurtz, he can make a judgment. For Bors, seeing the Grail is a spiritual experience. He sees it for a moment and is overwhelmed, but the experience has little meaning for him in the world of sense. He returns to Camelot and has nothing to say. When Arthur asks Bors if he saw the Grail he can only reply: "Ask me not, for I may not speak of it;/ I saw it" (755-56).

Percival is the other Grail seeker who is specifically named. He is the first to swear the vow and next to Galahad has the clearest vision of the Grail. He sees the Grail with the veil withdrawn and catches, as well, a glimpse of "the spiritual city and all her spires/ And gateways in a glory like one pearl" (526-27). However, on the scale of usefulness on which we measured Galahad and Gawain earlier, he measures no better than they did. His spiritual experience produces no material or earthly usefulness. He does not benefit in the world of sense and the world of sense does not benefit from his experiences. In fact, the quest seems to have had, if anything, derogatory effects on him. The two references to him before the quest are both complimentary. In "Merlin and Vivien," Merlin tells Vivien after she has accused Percival of a lecherous act: "A sober

man is Percival and pure" (753). He is again mentioned in "Lancelot and Elaine" where "the meek Sir Percival/ And pure Sir Galahad" (1256-57) are appointed to lift Elaine from her funeral barge. The only time we hear of him again is in the idyll following "The Holy Grail," "Pelleas and Ettarre," where in a brief encounter with Pelleas he becomes, as it were scandalmonger, and succeeds only in driving Pelleas to further distraction.

Percival suffers from a basic illusion already discussed in this chapter in connection with Pellam. He is not unlike Pellam who will not "defile" heavenly things with earthly uses, when he complains that the knights are wasting "the spiritual strength" within them which is "better offer'd up to heaven" (36-37). Percival is attacking the vainglorious jousts which women come to watch and cheer at, and possibly he is justified in doing so. However, the implication that spiritual strength is best offered up to heaven is fallacious. Spiritual strength is best employed when "wasted" or used up on earth.

Percival suffers from another illusion which is brought out vividly when he is contrasted with Ambrosius. Ambrosius is an earthy sort of person who loves to mingle with common folk,

And knowing every honest face of theirs
As well as ever shepherd knew his sheep,
And every homely secret in their hearts,
Delight myself with gossip and old wives,
And ills and aches, and teething, lyings-in
And mirthful sayings, children of the place,
That have no meaning half a league away;
Or lulling random squabbles when they rise,

Chafferings and chatterings at the market-cross,
Rejoice, small man, in this small world of mine,
Yea, even in their hens and in their eggs. (550-60)

Ambrosius asks Percival: "Came ye on none but phantoms in your quest,/ No man, no woman?" (562-63) and Percival answers: "All men, to one so bound by such a vow,/ And women were as phantoms" (564-65). Percival cannot enjoy people as Ambrosius can. To Ambrosius the Grail is a phantom but to Percival people are phantoms. Ambrosius is a small man in a small world who enjoys mingling with the village people and listening to their mirthful sayings and lulling random squabbles. Percival can have no pleasure in such a pastime. For him things of this earth turn to dust, and this is his illusion. While it may be true that things of this earth were dust and will become dust, they can be seen, nevertheless, as transformed by the hand of the Creator into very marvelous things. To see them as dust rather than in their transformed state is to deny God his creative powers. To see what is meant by the world as God's creation transformed by God's creative power one need only think of Michelangelo's painting of the creation of Adam on the roof of the Sistine Chapel. In one breathtaking moment two worlds unite. God reaches down and touches man, and man takes the form of a god. Thus, an important relationship is established in which the spiritual transforms the physical and brings it into harmony with itself. Percival, as well as Galahad, Pellam, and Arthur's younger knights all strive to divorce the world of soul from the world of sense. They do not realize that "spiritual strength," to use Percival's phrase, must be used in the physical

world of the senses. It is of value only in so far as it rights human wrongs. But Percival has renounced the physical world. All he can do with his spiritual strength is offer it up to heaven where it is not needed.

When Percival's sister first desired the Grail to come she hoped "that it would come,/ And heal the world" (93-94). The Grail comes but, ironically, it does not heal the world, it does the opposite. The first signs of the physical crumbling of Camelot occur in "The Holy Grail." When Percival returns to Camelot he finds

. . . heaps of ruin, hornless unicorns,
Crack'd basilisks, and splinter'd cockatrices,
And shatter'd talbots, which had left the stones
Raw that they fell from....(714-17)

The two that see the Grail clearly, have no intentions of healing the world; they retire from it. The decay of Camelot has begun before the Grail seekers leave on their quest but their leaving on the quest deals Camelot a blow from which it never recovers. In the final analysis the Grail seekers' quest for an utter purity which has no touch of earth is as damaging as the sensuality that has crept into Camelot.

Arthur, himself, must be included in this chapter, for like Galahad and Percival he exists more in the world of soul than in the world of sense, but unlike Galahad and Percival he does not exist there because he chooses to do so. Galahad and Percival consciously try to leave behind the world of sense and move into the world of soul, while Arthur is in the world of soul striving

to penetrate the world of sense. But Arthur is never entirely successful.

In chapter two we discussed Arthur's deceptiveness, but we have not yet discussed Arthur as a deceived man. Arthur shows a sharp and penetrating insight in his evaluation of the Grail quest. Because he belongs more to the world of soul than to the world of sense, in things pertaining to the world of soul he can make quick and accurate judgments. But in things pertaining to the world of sense he has at best a hazy insight and this is perhaps why he is not entirely successful in achieving his goals.

In "Gareth and Lynette," Merlin tells Gareth, "the King/... cannot brook the shadow of any lie" (286-87). Later Vivien echoes him when in her attempt to persuade Balin to spy on Lancelot and Guinevere, she tells Balin, "Meet is it the good King be not deceived" ("Balin and Balan" 525). However, Arthur is easily deceived by those within his own court. He is forced to brook outright lies by Lancelot and his queen. In "Lancelot and Elaine," Lancelot speaks "against the truth" when he tells Arthur as an excuse to stay with the ill Guinevere rather than fight in the tournament:

Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,
And lets me from the saddle. (93)

Guinevere then persuades Lancelot to fight in the tournament in disguise (150) and Arthur is not let in on the secret. Later when Guinevere explains the plot to Arthur, she says it was Lancelot's plot and not hers (575-82). Arthur, obviously annoyed, replies:

Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,
 In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,
 To have trusted me as he hath trusted thee. (586-88)

He does not realize that the queen is herself "idly dallying with the truth," even as she speaks to him.

Although it is meet that the King be not deceived, Arthur is probably the first seriously deceived man in the Idylls. He is under an illusion when he marries Guinevere in "The Coming of Arthur." He falls in love with Guinevere at first sight and concludes hastily,

 saving I be join'd
 To her that is the fairest under heaven,
 I seem as nothing in the mighty would,
 And cannot will my will nor work my work
 Wholly....(83-87)

The word wholly suggests at least three meanings. It can be taken in the sense of being complete, or in the sense of wholesome, or in the sense of holy; but in all three senses it is ironic. Guinevere completes nothing for Arthur; she tears into fragments. She is not wholesome for Arthur; she loves Lancelot. She is not holy; she prefers a touch of earth to high and passionless purity. Arthur is deceived when he marries her.

Arthur is in some respects appallingly naive. It is hard to imagine that Arthur could live with Guinevere and not suspect her unfaithfulness. He must certainly know that some kind of relationship exists between Lancelot and Guinevere for their names are often linked, toasts are drunk to both of them together, and Lancelot gives all the prizes he wins at the tournaments to her.

Perhaps Arthur is as innocent as the young knights that the minstrel of Caerleon sings about and assumes that their relationship is a pure one which transcends the physical and reflects only a sort of heavenly love. Possibly he suffers from an illusion similar to Pelleas's when Pelleas lent "All the young beauty of his own soul to" (79) Ettarre and so was deceived. Arthur swears vows of trust and love with both Lancelot and Guinevere. To Arthur "Man's word is God in man" ("The Coming of Arthur" 132) and he cannot conceive of himself going against his word. Perhaps he puts his own honesty into Lancelot and Guinevere, and assumes that they cannot go against their word either. At any rate he is blind to what is happening. Had he known he surely would have taken some action. He tells his queen in "Guinevere:"

I hold that man the worst of public foes
 Who either for his own or children's sake,
 To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife
 Whom he knows false abide and rule the house. (509-12)

Arthur's unawareness of his queen's adultery is not the only evidence of his blindness. He is also blind, or at least bewildered, when in "The Last Tournament" where the signs of degeneracy are obvious and the ruin of Camelot is all but complete, he can ask Lancelot:

Is it then so well?
 Or mine the blame that oft I seem as he
 Of whom was written, "A sound was in his ears"?
 The foot that loiters, bidden go, -- the glance
 That only seems half-loyal to command, --
 A manner somewhat fallen from reverence --
 Or have I dream'd the bearing of our knights
 Tells of a manhood ever less and lower? (114-21)

He senses something is amiss but he is not sure whether he sees or dreams. He is in the world of soul and he sees the world of sense as in a vision.

Yet even when he does know he takes little action. He is aware of Gawain's unfaithfulness but all he does is frown and tell him he will send him on no more quests ("Lancelot and Elaine" 710-13). He must have been aware of Tristram's unfaithfulness but he does nothing. He should certainly have been aware of Modred's treachery yet he leaves him alone and apparently in charge at Camelot ("Guinevere" 193) while he is fighting Lancelot who he thinks holds his queen. It is almost as if Arthur's fate is written and there is no changing it. He is a Christ and must have his cross so the old order can yield to a new.

Pellam builds a shrine and having excluded physical comforts and surrounded himself with relics he is under the illusion that he has entered the world of soul and under a further illusion that he now has no responsibilities in the world of sense. The young knights of Arthur's court are deceived in thinking that by imitating life as they imagine it to be in the world of soul they have gained an enviable "utter purity." Galahad and Percival seek the Grail and hope it will transport them to the world of soul, but they forget that the Grail was originally intended to heal the world of its ills. Arthur strives to go in a reverse direction. He is in the world of soul attempting to penetrate the world of sense so he can heal it of its ills, but he cannot penetrate it deeply enough to understand it fully.

CHAPTER V

A LITTLE WISE

In this thesis our concern has been to show that deceit, deceptiveness, and illusion form an intricate part of the thematic pattern of the Idylls. We have seen how the tragic dilemma of many characters results from their failure to adapt themselves to their deceptive two-world environment. Some are trapped in the world of sense and blind to the world of soul; others despair of the world of sense, and desire to live only in the world of soul. Arthur himself, we have seen, is a man trapped by his own high nature, a man who has difficulty understanding the world which he wants to bring into a new balance of sense and soul. We now must look at those few characters who adapt themselves to the two-world environment.

Arthur's knights sing in "The Coming of Arthur:" "The King will follow Christ and we the King" (499). As long as this pattern is followed both the king and his knights are successful in establishing a realm and maintaining order. The knights who follow Arthur need not be worried about their deceptive two-world environment for in Arthur they have a mediator between themselves and the evasive world of soul. And so by following Arthur they can solve the problem of being deceived by their inherently deceptive environment. Gareth adopts this solution. When he goes on his quest he is brilliantly successful. He has no special insight. When he

approached the gate of Camelot he was as confused by the misty city, its mysterious king, the moving art, and the ancient seer, as any man would have been. He is baffled by the deceptiveness of death at the end of the idyll. He has no special insight but by following Arthur he overcomes all the pitfalls of youth, middle age, old age, and finally death itself.

Edyrn also finds a solution. He was a friend of Doorm's and lived like Doorm. He insulted the queen and ruined Yniol, his uncle, when he refused to let him have his daughter. Then Geraint overthrew him. He experienced a moment of truth and can tell Geraint when he meets him later in "Geraint and Enid:"

... once when I was up so high in pride
That I was halfway down the slope to hell,
By overthrowing me you threw me higher. (789-91)

He realizes that what he once thought was up is down and so he makes an about turn and becomes Arthur's knight and is no longer the deceived man Doorm is.

In "Lancelot and Elaine" Guinevere says of Arthur:

No keener hunter after glory breathes.
He loves it in his knights more than himself;
They prove to him his work. (155-57)

Edyrn proves Arthur's work and Arthur is proud of him. Arthur does not very often praise one knight to another but when he meets Geraint in "Geraint and Enid" he cannot help saying:

Have ye look'd
At Edyrn? have ye seen how nobly changed?
This work of his is great and wonderful.
His very face with change of heart is changed.

The world will not believe a man repents;
 And this wise world of ours is mainly right.
 Full seldom doth a man repent, or use
 Both grace and will to pick the vicious quitch
 Of blood and custom wholly out of him.
 And make all clean, and plant himself afresh.
 Edyrn has done it.... (895-905)

From the illusion of a sensual existence Edyrn can, by means of grace and self will, clean his slate, as it were, and follow Arthur, who follows Christ.

There are characters in the Idylls other than Arthur's knights who can adapt themselves to their two-world environment. Elaine is such a character. She possesses a natural piety -- a peculiar blend of sense and soul. She is the lily maid of Astolat whose favour is a red sleeve.

In the Idylls the white color of the lily is symbolic of soul, or purity, and the color red is symbolic of sense. The Lady of the Lake is clothed in white samite. Arthur's knights are dressed in stainless white as they attend the marriage of their king. The audience at the tournament of Innocence is required to wear white dress, but this is shed for the wild festivities that follow. The sensual queen prefers red roses to white lilies and delights in the color of the low sun. The three knights Gareth slays are all associated with the color red. The Morning-Star flies a red banner from his pavilion. The Noonday Sun is mounted on a red horse. The Evening-Star is suffused in a "rose-red from the west." The most sensual of all in the Idylls is the Red Knight who wears blood-red

armour. The Holy Grail is closed in white samite but is itself "Redder than any rose." It resolves the conflict of sense and soul. It leaves the world of soul to heal ills in the world of sense. Elaine is like the Holy Grail. She too resolves the conflict of sense and soul. In her both can exist. Furthermore, she might have healed Lancelot's ills. She could have healed the "homeless trouble" in his eyes by giving him love, companionship, and heirs. To Arthur a woman like Elaine is the greatest gift man can expect on earth:

...after heaven, on our dull side of death,
What should be best, if not so pure a love
Cloth'd in so pure a loveliness? (1371-73)

Elaine is a tragic figure in the Idylls but not because of any illusion on her part. She is aware of what is going on. She writes and sings her own song of love and death. "I fain would follow love, if that could be;/ I needs must follow death, who calls for me" ("Lancelot and Elaine" 1009-10), she sings as she clearly sees her future reduced to the two great elemental choices of love and death. She bids for love and must settle for death but she charms both. Death for her is more a reward than a punishment. Like the Grail she returns to the world of soul when she is no longer appreciated. We do not pity her when she dies as much as we pity Lancelot for being unable to choose her.

Ambrosius also finds a balance between sense and soul. Although he lives in an isolated monastery he does not strive to

find soul by fleeing from sense. He finds soul in the warmth of human fellowship. He does not chase wandering fires or look for the world of soul in far away places. He is a small man in a small world who can enjoy and perhaps even recognize soul in people as they talk of their hens and eggs.

Gareth, Edyrn, Elaine, and Ambrosius are all heroes in the Idylls in the sense that they find solutions to a perplexing problem. But the greatest hero in the Idylls when the theme of deception is studied is little Dagonet. He has the greatest insight of all. In a crumbling society of deceived men in a deceptive world, Dagonet stands alone and with his eye on Arthur's star even in open day, and with his ears tuned to the harmony of its music, he dances like a withered leaf. Tristram is puzzled and asks Dagonet why he dances and Dagonet replies:

Belike for lack of wiser company;
Or being fool, and seeing too much wit
Makes the world rotten, why, belike I skip
To know myself the wisest knight of all. (245-48)

He is the wisest knight of all. When Tristram plays his broken music he perceives it is degraded and he stands "Quiet as any water-sodden log/ Stay'd in the wandering warble of a brook" (252-53). He notices the wine in the fountain has turned to mud even though the cup is still gold. Outwardly the Camelot society has not changed a great deal. It still has its dazzling tournaments but the knights in the last tournament compared to knights in former tournaments are as muddy water compared to wine. Dagonet spits out the mud. He would

not always have done so. Tristram reminds him that he was once a swine and "Smuttier than blasted grain"(305) and Dagonet admits he has been fouled by the "dirty nurse, Experience" (317). He admits he wallowed but then he washed and now he dances. Who can tell the dancer from the dance or the dance from the music? Dagonet is all in one. He is both sense and soul. He is the thistle and the fig; the bristles and the silk. He is the burning spurge and the milk; the hornet-combs and the honey. He is the swine that wallowed and he is the pure music of Arthur's star in heaven all in the withered body of a dancing fool in a world that is flesh and shadow.

Dagonet achieves the supreme feat. The two apparently incompatible worlds of sense and soul are united in him. He can see his vision and remain on earth. Gareth and Edyrn cannot see and hear the star in the world of soul but can dance in harmony to it by keeping Arthur's vows. Dagonet can see and hear the star while he dances with his feet on the walks of Camelot. Galahad and Percival might have achieved the same feat but they did not stay to dance. The world of sense vanished from them when they caught a glimpse of the world of soul. Tristram and Gawain stayed but they could not hear the music. They had eyes and ears but were too blind to see and too deaf to hear. Lancelot could faintly hear the music but when he tried to dance a madness gripped him. It was left for Little Dagonet, the fool, to achieve what the mighty could not achieve.

This thesis has examined the illusion of characters faced with the riddle of sense and soul in the mystery of a deceptive two-world environment -- characters who themselves exist inside the enigma of Tennyson's poem. Most of the characters could not solve the riddle. Some tried to move entirely into the world of sense while others tried to move entirely into the world of soul; but both groups were deceived, for they did not realize that the two worlds were intricately related in the life of man, and for a man to deny one was to deny half of his existence. Others who could recognize both the worlds of sense and soul found that the two worlds were at war with each other and they were unable to bring about a truce. But little Dagonet solved the riddle. He united both worlds in a harmonious fusion as he captured the music of the soul in his body and danced upon the rubble of Camelot.

And so, what is foolish has shamed the wise; what is weak has shamed the strong. Dagonet, the fool, succeeds where even the great King Arthur and his chief knight, Lancelot, fail. Dagonet wallowed and then washed. Arthur has never wallowed. He has not been fouled by Dagonet's dirty nurse, Experience. He can neither understand the world of sense nor be understood by it. He is deceived by even his queen and his greatest warrior; in fact, those closest to him deceive him most. Arthur cannot penetrate the world of sense. Like Dagonet he can hear the music. "I and Arthur and the Angels hear,/ And then we skip," says Dagonet ("The Last Tournament" 350-51). Arthur can hear the music but he cannot put his feet firmly

upon the ground. He is a hanged man who dances with nimble feet upon the air. Lancelot has wallowed. His feet are on the ground and he tries to dance to the music but a tide of blood within him rushes against the flow of the music and the two clash together in a foam of madness. But he does not retreat and when he dies the seas are calm. He learns the dance on his deathbed. He dies a fool. "Let no man deceive himself. If any man ... seemeth to be wise ... let him become a fool, that he may be wise" (I Cor. 3:18). Arthur, Lancelot, and Dagonet are all fools. They heed the silent music of the stars. They bring, or attempt to bring, the world of sense into harmony with the world of soul. They all make, as it were, figs out of thistles. All three are fools and Dagonet is the wisest fool. The most shriveled thistle is the sweetest fig.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter III

¹Henry Van Dyke. The Poetry of Tennyson. 170.

²Joseph Conrad. Three Great Tales. New York: Vintage Books, n.d. 297-98.

³Ibid., 297.

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1. List of Abbreviations

EJ	English Journal
ELH	English Literary History
HAB	Humanities Association Bulletin
JEGP	Journal of English and Germanic Philology
MLN	Modern Language Notes
N&Q	Notes and Queries
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association
TC	Twentieth Century
VN	Victorian Newsletter
VP	Victorian Poetry

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